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ABSTRACT

Due to increased emphasis on student success and increasing recognition of the school principal's role in creating/maintaining a culture of success, preparation programs in school administration are undergoing increased scrutiny. This prompted the creation of a set of standards for school leaders by the Council of Chief State School Officers and a guide to articulate those standards by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration. The emphasis of the standards is on the cognitive domain. At the State University of New York at Cortland, students are eligible to do an internship after seven or eight three-credit classes. Interns must submit letters of commitment from various administrators accepting the role of mentor and the responsibility for providing and/or opening the door to a wide variety of administrative experiences. Upon acceptance, a university supervisor is appointed. Most students dedicate themselves to the internship full-time. Researchers assessed what the internship taught and the needs that classroom preparation did not fulfill. Respondents focused on such areas as their learning to go with the flow, becoming a historian and anthropologist of the culture, developing an understanding of the school's purpose and value, dealing with the staggering demands of the job, and enjoying the rush of everything coming together. (Contains 10 references.) (SM)

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What Interns in School Administration Said They Learned from Their Internship: Program Implications

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Due to the increased emphasis on student success and the increasing recognition of the role of the school principal in creating/maintaining a culture of success (Peterson & Deal, 1990 & 1998; Krajewski, 1996), preparation programs in school administration are undergoing increased scrutiny. This has prompted the creation of a set of standards for school leaders by the Council of Chief State School Officers (1996). Also, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration created a guide to articulate these standards for the preparation of school leaders.

The guide is entitled "Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership for Principals, Superintendents, Curriculum Directors, and Supervisors" (2001) These program standards address seven areas. The first six of these areas are prefaced in the same way:

> Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote success of all students by ...
> Standard 1.0: Facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a school or district vision of learning supported by the school community (p. 2).
> Standard 2.0: Promoting a positive school culture, proving an effective instructional program, applying best practices to student learning, and designing comprehensive professional growth plans for staff (p. 4).
> Standard 3.0: Managing the organization, operation, and resources in a way that promotes a safe and effective, and efficient learning environment (p.7).
> Standard 4.0: Collaborating with families and other community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources (p. 9).
> Standard 5.0: Acting with integrity, fairly, and in an ethical manner (p. 13).
> Standard 6.0: Understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context (p. 14).

The seventh deals with the internship:

> Standard 7.0: The internship provides significant opportunities for candidates to synthesize and apply the knowledge and practice and develop the skill identified in Standards 1-6 through substantial, sustained, standards-based work in real settings, planned and guided cooperation by the institution and school district personnel for graduate credit (p. 16).

It is clear by looking at the language of these Standards, i.e., facilitating, promoting, managing, acting and understanding, the emphasis lies largely in the cognitive domain, as it should be. An administrative preparation program must provide its students with the information necessary to address the complex issues found in public schools today. Exit surveys from such programs typically ask for responses in two areas: 1) major areas of instruction (basically the standards) to determine what needs bolstering, and 2) open-ended questions about how the students feel about the program. But, what is it that they have learned in the affective domain? What issues have affected them the most? Since significant effort has gone into making the internship a "capstone" experience for the students in the program surveyed here, it seems appropriate to raise this question upon internship completion.

The Program

At the State University of New York (SUNY) at Cortland, after seven or eight three-credit classes (out of a program required 30 credits), students are eligible to do an internship. In addition to a required intern application, three documents must also be submitted. They are letters of commitment are by (1) a central office person to support the student for recognition by the school board as 'an administrator in training,' and (2) a seated administrator, accepting the role of mentor and the responsibility for providing and/or 'opening the door' to a wide variety of administrative experiences. The last element is (3) a job description delineating the intern's responsibilities to the school district during the internship. (The job description is to ensure that there will be substantial administrative responsibilities. The intern's job requirements, while frequently

overlapping that of the internship, are not sufficient to satisfy the institution's required diversity in administrative experience.)

Upon acceptance, a university supervisor is appointed. Through repeated on-site visitations and periodic electronic interactions, the university supervisor provides a perspective on the experience, in addition to that of the on-site supervisor.

The majority of students dedicated themselves to the internship full-time, either one semester or two, or half-time, a minimum of three consecutive hours when students are present in the building, for two semesters. In this way, a significant degree of intensity of the administrative experience is encountered.

Being almost finished, if not completely, with course work that not only meets the Standards, but provides for elective courses that reinforce them and with this level of support (both school district and university), one would think that an internship would be a routine matter of applying the Standards in which they have been trained. To understand what an internship teaches and needs that classroom preparation did not fulfill, an end-of-program, informal, qualitative assessment was made. What was it that the internship taught them that was not a part of their academic preparation?

Findings and Implications

What follows is a number of examples from this assessment. They are not actual quotes, but adaptations from what was collected so as to provide anonymity to the contributors. A number of the topic headings under which they are grouped are suggested by Kent D. Peterson (2001, p.20). Others are created by the author in order to address additional issues found in the research.

Learning To Go With The Flow:

"I rarely am able to achieve closure at the time I am working on something. Either I am interrupted in what I am doing or there is not enough information available at that moment. So, there is usually a time lapse before closure. As a classroom teacher, I felt more control and enjoyed the satisfaction of closure more."

"I have come to realize that there are days when my carefully constructed 'To Do' list just won't get done."

"Everything is going along smoothly. You are keeping all the juggling balls in the air, then someone throws you a basketball!"

It is clear that students in the program are expressing their frustrations at having very little control of their time. It is generally true at their level, the entry level, administrators are anxious to be seen as responsive and able to deal with whatever challenges with confront them. Thus, they allow their time to be consumed by any and all demands by others.

The program implication is the necessity of including the teaching of an understanding of 'time management,' not the traditional one, but one such as that of Stephen Covey (1990). In Covey's view, while it is important to include concepts "of prioritization, of clarifying values and of comparing the relative worth of activities based on their relationship to those values" in structuring one's time, there also must be a "focus on preserving and enhancing *relationships* and on accomplishing *results*" (p.149-150). In other words, prioritization should not only include consideration of what is important to the organization, but also that that is necessary to keep relationships (especially with teachers) strong. Such criteria can be made part of the traditional In-Basket activity in which students are to order a large number of issues based on Covey's "Time Management Matrix" (p. 151).

Become A Historian and Anthropologist of the Culture:

"Coming into a new school, I found so many things that are entrenched. Before I dare suggest changes, I must understand how these things got to be the way they are."

"There is no quick way to discover the culture of the school. Every minute must be listening and learning about why things are the way they are. Every frustration must be understood in the context of the culture that is and/or has been."

In order for an administrator to bring about effective change, it is necessary for the people of a school community's thinking to change. People don't think the way they do for some random reason. There is a history to its development. Furthermore, they won't give that thinking up just because they are asked or are told. We all know how people respond to directives that are followed by, "Because I said so."

A school administrator attempting to be a change agent needs to understand not only what that thinking is, but also in what it is rooted. In this way, the administrator can analyze what is now different from when the thinking was developed. By pointing out the difference and sharing how the new thinking will better address the current situation, s/he has a better chance of influencing the people.

The program implication is that professors of educational administration must do more than just teach elements of and assign exercises to have students depict a particular school's culture. There needs to be an element of problem solving with regard to a school's culture. Questions such as the following would be appropriate: What approach would be taken if one wanted to go to block scheduling (for example) *for that school*? Who would be the first people one would approach? What approach, logic, facts, etc. would one employ in dealing with them?

Develop A Deep Understanding of the School's Purpose and Value

"Sometimes I spent part of my busy day reading manuals and policies of the school district."

"New programs are confusing as they seem to overlap or be at cross purposes. I need to understand their purpose in the big picture."

"The school board's and the administration's purpose, values, and goals don't seem to match those of the community."

"Many of the experiences make me feel inept and searching for the answer to 'How can I serve the educational process?'"

From these comments, it is clear the interns come from environments in which the teachers' focus has been almost entirely on the delivery of instruction. Since this educational leadership program requires the possession of a masters degree in some other discipline, these teachers have a minimum of three years and, possibly, as many as twenty years classroom experience. So, with that amount of time in the profession, they have not dealt much with the bigger issues in education. It is most common that, until they reach the internship, the existence of a district policy manual is but a vague recollection. Attendance at board of education meetings is limited to only those required for their school's annual presentation or other required activity. Incidents of individuals in the program participating in district-wide strategic plan development do occur, but are rare.

The program implication is to have various courses pose, more often, philosophical questions as to the nature and purpose of education. Such discussions should not be limited to issues contemplated by those such as Socrates, Rousseau, and Dewey. Students should be asked to think about the purpose young people's education serves for *their* community. There should be an investigation of their district's manuals for statements of what, and sometime how, things are taught. In addition, an examination of state requirements should be made. The question, "What greater purpose does this or that requirement suppose to serve?" should be struggled with. Perhaps in this way, some of the issues posed in the above quotes will not be such "burning" questions.

The Demands of the Job Can be Staggering:

"The job can't be done."
"Insurmountable workload"
"I feel 'beat up' and go home exhausted."
"Keeping track of all the new regulations is impossible."

In these times of budget limitations, districts look to interns as inexpensive means of meeting existing needs. There are cases where interns are given responsibilities beyond their experience and training or simply an overwhelming volume. It is the duty of the university supervisor to try to intercede on behalf of the intern. However, the intern, not wishing to look incompetent or ungrateful to school district personnel, may request the university supervisor do nothing to intervene. They would rather "grin and bear it." In such a case, all the supervisor can do is provide a sympathetic ear.

The program implication would be to alert the interns at the outset of the their internship program to this possibility. In this way, such abuses can be addressed in a timely manner rather than after they have gotten "out of hand."

Enjoy the Rush

"It is so great when everything comes together. Everyone is happy and feels successful."
"Remember to stop and celebrate the successes, yours and others."
"Don't feel guilty about a satisfying day."
"There is so little time to get things done that it is hard to take time to celebrate when it is deserved."

The life of an intern is usually described as being hectic. Moving from one thing to another in rapid succession, often with closure being far off, there is little time to reflect on what has been achieved. Being interns, most often these interactions would be considered putting out "little fires" or, at least, making sure they do not get to be big

ones. Reaching the end of the day without a major "blow-up" is, most often, the extent of their satisfaction.

The program implication is to teach the student to look for those opportunities to celebrate success. Of course the celebration should be commensurate with the degree of success obtained. Students need to know that if, when working with an individual teacher who demonstrates significant improvement in an instructional technique, it is acceptable, even desirable to, say, provide coffee and donuts for the two of you the morning following the lesson presentation. At the other end of the spectrum, students must have explained to them the value of treating the entire faculty to a "Thank You" breakfast served in the cafeteria by the administration on the occasion of a school-wide achievement such as a successful accreditation visit. Such celebrations show a faculty member or an entire faculty that the administration appreciates their efforts. This may increase their willingness to participate in the next undertaking is an important lesson.

Practice Can be a Long Way From Theory:

"We don't do a lot of collaboration."
"Consensus decision-making? We don't do it."
"My principal says s/he is to busy to be an instructional leader."
"The decisions are still top down."

The program, in preparing the next generation of administrators, must be teaching the best administrative practices. Small, rural school districts are particularly noted for having administrators who have held their positions for decades. As such, these districts will shortly be in need of those being trained now. Due to tight budgets, the preponderance of interns is able to get administrative experience only in their own districts. (This is not the most desirable, but a practical necessity.) Thus the present practices that will be observed will be disparate with what they have been taught.

The program implication would be to acknowledge this disparity in classes. When soliciting examples of a new concept or practice from students' experiences and getting very few or none, the discussion should be directed toward where could it be applied and how might it be introduced if the professionals involved in implementing it have not been exposed to the practice before.

In this way, when the opportunity to apply the concept or practice presents itself during the internship, the intern would be prepared to suggest its use to the mentor in a way that might gain acceptance. This would be preferable to a simply statement of the concept and getting rejected, as seen in the statements above.

Having Authority is an Awesome Responsibility:

"You have a lot of power to make a school a great, happy place. You also have the power to make very large mistakes, which could destroy a school."

" I am learning the importance of balancing patience with authority. It is important to gather as much information as possible in order to make an informed decision or react appropriately."

"One of our biggest jobs is to make decisions, maybe hundreds of decisions each and every day. Sometimes there is no right answer and you still need to make the decision."

Since almost all those enrolled in the program are certificated teachers with a number of years of experience, they have had plenty of opportunity to observe an administrator as s/he fulfilled her/his duties. Although most of the decisions appear to have been made with a minimum of conflict or objection, it takes time to achieve such a level of proficiency, considering the level of complexity of many of them. There certainly must have been some 'bad' decisions during that time, but lessons were learned and, most likely, not repeated.

The program implication is to give them the opportunity to make some of those decisions and learn of their ramifications, first hand. This is, indeed, a large part of the internship process. Having the on-site supervisor (mentor) close at hand for consultation before or for 'picking up the pieces' after, makes the challenge of decision making more risk free.

But what about those still taking classes? What can we offer them in the way of preparation? There is a new strategy on the horizon; one that will make the use of case studies obsolete. Although not on the market, a computer-housed simulation is under development. Much like the sophisticated computer games for young adults today, it will be a branching program that will take one in a number of directions, depending on how a list of issues is address and the collection of a number of pieces of information. At this point, one can only imagine working through a problem, badly, in such a system and ending by having to live with an arbitrator's decision that is worse than a compromise that could have been made earlier. Conversely, think of what it would be like to work through a difficult decision with setbacks along the way and only limited central office support to do something great to improve student achievement!

Conclusion

An internship with this kind of intensity will undoubtedly continue to produce a full range of feeling, by the time it concludes. These feelings can range from the satisfaction of reaching the threshold of the change to an administrative position to the frustration of only beginning to understand the philosophies, duties, and responsibilities associate with the job. As instructors of school administration, it is only proper to

recognize the fact that they exist in a unique combination in each of the interns we supervise and it is our obligation to help put them into proper perspective. Dealing with the most common, as determined by whatever qualitative method desired, in various courses as suggested here, can only enhance the experience of the internship and thus the value of the program in preparing administrators of the future.

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